

Iowa Wesleyan College (Mount Pleasant
Collegiate Institute), Pioneer Hall
South side of Broad Street, between Main
and Broadway Streets
Mount Pleasant
Henry County
Iowa

HABS No. IA-60

HABS
IOWA,
44-MOPLA,
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
IOWA WESLEYAN COLLEGE, PIONEER HALL
(Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute, Pioneer Hall) HABS No. IA-60

Location: Iowa Wesleyan College, Mount Pleasant, Henry County, Iowa.
South side of Broad Street, between Main and Broadway Streets
Present owner: Iowa Wesleyan College, Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

Present use: College offices.

Significance: Pioneer Hall was the first building on Iowa Wesleyan campus and it represents an architectural design characteristic of its period.

PART 1.

HISTORY

Dates of construction:

March 1843, or shortly thereafter, through the end of 1845. The building was put in use on 1 January 1846 (3, pp. 1,4).

Chronology:

- 1843 March 8 The incorporators of the Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute engaged Aristides Joel Priest Huestis as agent for the Institute to raise funds and construct a building (3, p. 1).
- 1843 March 11 John Jones, J. C. Hall, Samuel Brazelton, and Peter Smith donated twenty acres of land to the Institute with the provision that an educational building be built there and that it remain as an educational building (3, p. 1).

- 1845 Nov. 11 The construction of the building was sufficiently advanced to enable the school to plan to open on the first Monday in January (3, p. 3).
- 1845-1846 Fall A Daybook was kept by Huestis itemizing entries of work done on the building, material purchases, labor payment, and his fund raising trips (3, p. 3).
- 1846 Jan. 1 Pioneer Hall was opened as a school building for education at the primary and secondary levels (3, p.4).
- Later 1840's After Pioneer Hall was opened the first floor was used as classroom space and the second floor as living quarters for Huestis and his wife, as well as for Johnson Pierson, a faculty member, and his wife (4, p. 219).
- 1848 Sept. 15 It was reported to the Trustees that some of the older students refused to return to school unless better classroom conditions were provided. The Trustees resolved "to undertake the seating of said east room of the institution" (3, p. 6).
- 1849 March 15 Claims for payment for new seating and a stove for Pioneer Hall were presented (3, p. 6).
- 1850 Building repairs planned (4, p. 224).
- 1851 The Iowa Annual Conference recommended that classes not be held in Pioneer Hall until more improvements were made, including fences, plank walks, and out-houses (4, p. 225).

- 1854 James Harlan became president of the school and began efforts to raise funds to erect a new building to alleviate crowded conditions in Pioneer Hall (3, p. 6).
- 1855 Old Main was completed and most of the classes were moved from Pioneer Hall to Old Main (3, p. 6).
- 1858 June 22 Pioneer Hall was converted to a female boarding house to 1861 with Mrs. Maria A. J. Kelly as Preceptress, who occupied the east end of the second floor as her residence (3, p. 7).
- 1865-1870 Pioneer Hall was used as classroom space due to increases in attendance after the Civil War (3, p. 7).
- 1870-1875 Dr. John Wheeler, appointed president of the college, renovated Pioneer Hall for use as his residence during his tenure. During this time Wheeler, with the help of his two older sons, started the first Iowa Wesleyan magazine, The Iowa Classic, and a printing press was set up in one of the rooms of Pioneer Hall for printing of the magazine (3, p. 8).
- 1875-1884 Dr. Wesley J. Spaulding, the next president, also used Pioneer Hall as a home (3, p. 8).
- 1886 The building reverted exclusively to academic purposes. Whether John T. McFarland used it as a home during the early part of his presidency from 1884 to 1886 is unknown (3, p. 8).
- 1886-1909 Dr. Alexander Ronnel moved his music academy (then called the Iowa Conservatory of Music) into Pioneer

Hall, where it stayed until its 1909 shift to the Mount Pleasant German College Building. Some of the music concerts by Dr. Rommel during the music academy's stay were also held in Pioneer Hall (3, p. 9).

Early 1900's

The original front porch was removed and a new one was added. Also the east front door (of the two) was sealed off (3, p. 5).

1909-1952

Pioneer Hall was used for many purposes including classes in English and religion, housing the Department of Public Relations, and as a storage area for the Historical Collection of the Iowa Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (3, p. 9).

1926 May 30

The James Harlan Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution placed a bronze plaque near the south entrance of Pioneer Hall to recognize it as the oldest college building west of the Mississippi (3, p. 11).

1952-present

Pioneer Hall became the headquarters of the Department of English and has continued so to the present (3, p. 9).

Later 1900's

The three original chimneys on Pioneer Hall were removed in "modern times", but the fireplace remains (3, p. 5).

Architect or designer:

Unknown

Original and subsequent owners:

Deed dated 17 July 1844, filed for record 24 Dec 1852 in

Henry County, Iowa, Record L, p. 2

John Jones et al.

to

Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute

By John Jones and wife. A tract described as follows: Beginning at the southwest corner of the southeast quarter of Section 4 in Township 71 North, Range 6 West, thence East on the section line to a line extended northwardly from the East side of Main Street in Mount Pleasant in the same direction of the source of said street, thence northwardly on said center of Section 4 aforesaid North and South, thence South to the place beginning to include four acres of land, thence West to said line, thence South to the beginning, being four acres cut off from the South end of said Jones' land in Section 4 aforesaid, being a due East and West line.

By Jonathan C. Hall and wife. A tract described as follows: Beginning at the Northwest corner of the Northeast quarter of Section 9, Township 71 North, Range 6 West, thence East on the section line to the line above named running from Main Street, thence South on said line far enough where it runs West to the open line and North to the beginning to include six acres of land, thence West to the open line running North and South through the center of Section 9 aforesaid, thence North to the beginning, being six acres cut off from the North end of said Hall's land in Section 9 aforesaid, being a due East and West line. (2)

The building is now owned by the Iowa Wesleyan College (previously called the Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute).

Original and subsequent names:

The building was originally known as the "Institute Building" or the "Institution." During the period from 1906 to 1919 and the development of interest in the American frontier - Frederick Jackson Turner's essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" was published in 1893 - people began to refer to the building as the "Old Pioneer College Building" or the Pioneer Building. Later the name Pioneer Hall was adopted, but was not formally accorded to the building (3, pp. 9-11).

Contractors and supplies:

It seems likely that construction work was carried on directly under the supervision of Aristides Huestis, who proceeded to buy labor and materials as the funds allowed for construction of Pioneer Hall.

...there exists an order for payment of lumber under the date of October 1844. "Mr. A. J. Heustis will please pay John P. Grantham thirteen dollars, as he had settled that amount with me in the lumber which I furnished you for the Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute. William Henshaw" (3, p. 2).

Beginning in the fall of 1845 and continuing into 1846, Heustis kept a Daybook containing an itemized record of work done, materials purchased, labor paid, and fund-raising trips taken.

Historical events and persons associated with the building:

Mount Pleasant was named and platted by Presley Saunders in the fall of 1834, and on 25 October 1836 the first session of the legislature of the Territory of Wisconsin, of which present Iowa was then a part, defined the boundaries of Henry County (4, p. 206). The first religious organization in the town was the Methodist Episcopal Church, its activity beginning with a circuit rider from Burlington preaching in Presley Saunders' log cabin. In six years a congregation had been incorporated and had built a small church structure (4, p. 207).

Early attempts to found a college at Mount Pleasant were unsuccessful, although legislative authorization was given twice. The first time was as part of an omnibus bill passed by the Territory of Wisconsin legislature in 1838, in which authorization was given to open a seminary. The second time was when the Territory of Iowa passed an act to establish a university at Mount Pleasant (4, pp. 207-208). The relocation of the territorial capital from Burlington to Iowa City in 1842 dampened interest in a university in Mount Pleasant, which was close to Burlington in the southeastern portion of the territory and some distance from Iowa City.

The founding of Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute followed a bill on 17 February 1842 by the Iowa Territory legislature for the incorporation of what was called the Mount Pleasant Literary Institute (4, pp. 209-210). Five of the sixteen incorporators listed in the bill had been involved in one or both of the previous attempts to secure a college in the town. They were E. Killpatrick, Samuel Nelson, L. B. Hughes, C. W. Patterson, and Samuel Brazelton (4, p. 211). The Institute was founded some time between 17 February 1842 and 8 March 1843; the exact date is not known. The original trustees were J. C. Hall, P. C. Tiffany, Samuel Nelson, Nelson Lathrop, and Peter Smith. The Institute was under charge of the Methodist Episcopal Church, but there were no religious requirements for admission (4, pp. 209-213). Both men and women students were admitted (4, p. 219). On 8 March 1843 the incorporators engaged Aristides Joel Heustis as their agent to raise funds and erect a building (3, p.1).

Heustis was a New Englander who began his education when he was twenty-five years old with a year at the Wilbraham Academy, Massachusetts, and three years at Connecticut Wesleyan University. He taught school in New Jersey in 1835-1835 and was later asso-

ciated with the promotion of the Buckingham Female Collegiate Institute in Virginia. He then moved west to establish a school of his own or become identified with a new school (4, pp. 213-214).

On 11 November 1845, Heustis was elected president and professor of natural and moral science and belles lettres, and Johnson Pierson was elected professor ancient languages and literature (4, p. 218). Lewis Dwight, upon the illness and subsequent resignation of Heustis, was given a teaching position on 1 April 1848 (4, p. 222). Dwight, together with Rev. Joseph McDowell, who was employed as president and fund raiser in 1849, acquired the patronage of the Methodist Episcopal Church (4, p. 223).

When Pioneer Hall was converted into a boarding house for women in 1858, Mrs. Maria A. J. Kelly was placed in charge of the women students. She had received the first master of arts degree to be granted by the Institute in 1857. She served also as professor of natural history until 1861, when she resigned (3, p. 7).

PART 2.

DESCRIPTION

1. Materials of construction, system of construction: The building is soft red brick and wood of standard residential style and construction for the period.
2. Overall dimensions: 28 by 54 feet and two stories high (3, p. 2).
3. Number of bays: 6 along the front.
4. Number of stories: Two
5. Roof form: Gable with the ridge line running parallel with the long dimension of the building.

6. Notable exterior features:

The present building has some minor structural changes from the original. Architectural evidence suggests that in the earliest years there might not have been the south exterior porch and that a simple stone step stood outside the doors matching the door on the north side of the building. There were originally two front doors, side by side, which are indicated in a somewhat idealized drawing of 1886, the earliest representation, and in the earliest photograph taken sometime between 1892-1896. Both the drawings and the photograph show that the porch, whenever it was constructed, was smaller and much more ornate than the present one. The east front door was sealed off and the present porch added in the early years of the twentieth century. Three chimneys, on the ends and center, were removed in modern times, although the fireplaces still exist in the east and west walls (3, pp. 4-5).

7. Plan type: Many remodelings have taken place, and it is not possible to determine the original plan; however, the following quotation describing the building and taken from the "Minutes of the Iowa Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Annual Sessions 1844...1853" (Burlington, 1916, p. 14) is of some assistance:

...a substantial brick edifice, of academic dimensions, well built, and furnished with desks for 140 students in the male and female departments; room for library, apparatus and recitations and four resident rooms, forming a very comfortable residence for the president of the institution, of such other purposes as the trustees (4, p. 219).

8. Notable interior features: Fireplaces on the east and west walls.
9. Style category or features: The building style was similar to that of many homes of the period and was a somewhat common regional pattern. Similar in appearance are the Drake Farmhouse, built in 1861 and located on State Highway 92 twelve miles west of Winterset, and the Daniel Nelson Farmhouse on Glendale Road northwest of Oskaloosa and used today as the Mahaska County Historical Society Museum (3, p. 5).

10. Accessory buildings of note: None. Pioneer Hall is close to and directly in back of Old Main. In the nineteenth century there were privies conveniently located.

PART 3

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Primary or unpublished:

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2. _____. "Old Main." National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form. 7 August 1972.
3. _____. "Through the Decades...Pioneer..." Pamphlet. Christmas, 1969.
4. Haselmayer, Louis A. "The Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute; a Struggle for Existence." Annals of Iowa, ser. 3, 39: (Winter 1968): 205-232.

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